

Tuesday, June 29, 2010

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Veterans Receiving Dental Care Between 2009-2010 May Have Been Exposed to Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV

(WASHINGTON, DC) - Congressman Russ Carnahan (MO-3) is demanding a formal investigation into reports that over 1,800 veterans from Missouri, Illinois and other states may have been exposed to blood-borne pathogens at the John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis. Carnahan has contacted the White House, the Veterans Administration, and the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to insist upon an immediate and full investigation of the matter.

"This is absolutely unacceptable," said Carnahan. **"No veteran who has served and risked their life for this great Nation should have to worry about their personal safety when receiving much needed healthcare services from a Veterans Administration hospital."**

Yesterday the Veterans Administration began mailing 1,812 veterans from surrounding states (1,271 from Missouri; 495 from Illinois) who received dental treatment at St. Louis VA Medical Center at the John Cochran Division between February 1, 2009 and March 11, 2010 indicating that they may be a risk of contracting hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection.

"I can only imagine the horror and anger our veterans must be feeling after receiving this letter," said Russ Carnahan. **"They have every right to be angry. So am I."**

Carnahan today sent letters to President Obama and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, insisting they immediately investigate this indefensible breach of standard operating procedures and report back what will be done to remedy the issue and ensure that it never occurs again. In addition, Carnahan contacted House Veterans Committee Chairman Bob Filner (CA-51) to quickly schedule a hearing to look into the matter.

"Those responsible for this should be disciplined," said Carnahan. **"It's simply unacceptable."**

Carnahan urged Veterans who believe they may be affected to call 1-888-374-3046 to speak to health care staff who will be available to answer any questions schedule an appointment to obtain blood tests.

Veterans and family members who may have further questions or concerns are urged to contact Congressman Russ Carnahan's office at 314-962-1523.

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The text of Carnahan's letter to the VA follows:

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am writing to call for a formal investigation into reports that thousands of veterans in several states including Missouri could have been exposed to blood borne pathogens such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV while receiving dental care at John Cochran VA Medical Center. I understand that this exposure was caused by neglecting to follow manufacturer's directives in properly sanitizing dental equipment.

A grievance of this magnitude is absolutely unacceptable. No veteran who has served and risked their life for this great Nation should have to worry about their personal safety when receiving much needed healthcare services from a Veterans Administration hospital. The men and women who have served this nation deserve the very best health care available - anything

less is intolerable.

I insist that you open a formal investigation into this matter. The VA must determine what caused this indefensible breach of standard operating procedures and report what the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to do to address and remedy this unfortunate issue, so that it never occurs again.

Thank you for your immediate and full attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Russ Carnahan
Member of Congress